

# FaithBIT



## Dallas and New Orleans

**Reflection by Troy Sailer**

I was attending one of the final confirmation classes with my son, Eric, a few weeks ago when I learned that Immanuel was holding an informational meeting regarding the ELCA National Youth Gathering being held in Minneapolis next year. I told my son that I had attended when I was in youth group at my church growing up. He of course replied with, "they had those when you were a kid?!" I was excited to share with him that they sure did, way back when, and I got to go twice; once with my youth group to Dallas in 1991 and once as a chaperone to the New Orleans gathering in 1997.

I had not thought about those gatherings in years, but the memories did not take long to come back. All of the work fundraising to attend the 1991 Dallas gathering was totally worth it when we filled Reunion Arena and the Convention Center with 30,000 youth and their leaders!

It is hard to describe the feeling of all those people gathered for the same purpose: to worship God in the way that kids do - with a lot of energy and a lot of volume! The theme for the Dallas gathering was "Called to Freedom." Each day we would all gather for worship; we would sing, dance, and listen to that day's keynote speaker. Maya Angelou was just one of the speakers that we heard.

Bible study groups, workshops, carnival games, and rides were all a part of the Freedom Carnival. Friendships were strengthened and new friends in Christ were made. It was an opportunity that I am so glad I did not miss.

Six years later, I was approached and asked if I would chaperone a group from my hometown church to the youth gathering in New Orleans. Having attended the gathering in Dallas, I knew what the kids were going to gain by attending and that the experience is one they will not soon forget, so I happily joined the group and traveled to New Orleans.

It is amazing to feel the Holy Spirit and level of energy that over 30,000 youth gathered in the name of Christ can bring. Seeing how each person in my group responded to the different parts of the gathering was so rewarding. Some loved the group bible studies, others the community outreach projects; all enjoyed the main worship services when we filled the Superdome with singing and worship.

If you have a child that may be interested in attending the gathering next year, here in Minneapolis, encourage them to attend - and experience God and their faith in a truly amazing way.